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ABSTRACT

This study of Utah single welfare parents attempts to respond to several questions. What are the characteristics of this population, especially with respect to self-sufficiency? For instance, what percentage of the population requiring child care, has completed job training, etc.? What segments exist in the population? What are the clusters of self-sufficiency needs that exist for which programs may be designed? What programs and services are more critical? Focus groups with clients alone, case workers alone, and both together got qualitative information about parents receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). This information was used to create written questionnaires administered to all AFDC single parents. Results indicated that clients could usefully be clustered by personal and demographic characteristics, such as "teen mother," or "sexually abused," and that needs (housing, drug and alcohol treatment, etc.) varied by cluster. Clients identified good-paying jobs, job training, parenting classes, and related topics as the most necessary to achieve self-sufficiency. Four tables present study findings. (Contains 37 references.) (Author/SLD)

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ED 382 752

Ensuring Success--

Identifying and Meeting AFDC Clients' Training Needs

Presented to

League for Innovation in the Community College

February 1995

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Abstract

Funded by the Utah Department of Human Services and the Utah Department of Community and Economic Development, this study of Utah single welfare parents attempts to respond to the following questions: What are the characteristics of this population, especially with respect to self-sufficiency? For instance, what percentage of the population requires child care, has completed job training etc.? What segments exist in the population? What are the clusters of self-sufficiency needs that exist for which programs may be designed? What programs and services are most critical? Focus groups with clients alone, case workers alone, and both together got qualitative information about AFDC parents. This information was used to create written questionnaires administered to all AFDC single parents. Results indicated that clients could usefully be cluster by personal and demographic characteristics ("teen mother," "sexually abused," etc.) and that needs ("housing," "drug and alcohol treatment," etc.) varied by cluster. Clients identified "good-paying jobs," "job training," "parenting classes," etc. as the most necessary to achieve self-sufficiency.

POOR MOTHERS AND CHILDREN: IDENTIFYING AND MEETING WELFARE CLIENTS' TRAINING NEEDS

Introduction

Currently the population of Utah families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is overwhelmingly single-parent families. In October 1992, only 148 of all 18,220 cases on the Utah AFDC roles during the entire month consisted of two-parent households. Of all the single parents on AFDC, fewer than 10% of them are male, with the majority of AFDC families consisting of a single mother raising one or two children under age 12.

In addition to receiving financial support, other programs (such as child care and job training services) are made available to eligible AFDC recipients -- with the eventual goal of total self-sufficiency and withdrawal of AFDC financial support as the parent becomes able to support her family.

In order for AFDC recipients to become self-sufficient, different individuals will require different resources (e.g., job training, carfare, tools, substance abuse intervention, job interview preparation, etc.). This research project was born out of the desire to compile comprehensive information about the self sufficiency needs of the AFDC recipient population. What services will most effectively and cost efficiently meet the needs of this population? The Utah Department of Community and Economic Development, Office of Job Training and the Department of Human Services, Office of Family Support desired to collect such information the single-parent AFDC recipient

population. Specifically, the research questions addressed by this project include:

1. What are the characteristics of this population, especially with respect to self-sufficiency? For instance, what percentage of the population requires child care, has completed job training etc.?

2. What segments exist in the population? What are the clusters of self-sufficiency needs that exist for which programs may be designed?

3. What programs and services are most critical?

Research Overview

The AFDC Self-Sufficiency Needs Assessment project was designed to collect relevant information that would specifically address the research questions listed above. The project encompassed two phases, as follows:

1. Qualitative data collection: Focus groups were conducted to gather rich, qualitative information to aid in conceptualization of the problem and instrument design. Three focus groups of 14 to 18 persons were conducted, including various combinations of clients and caseworkers, separately and in combination.

2. Quantitative data collection: A mail survey collected quantitative information from 1,619 single-parent AFDC recipients.

The data collection was carried out by the Survey Research Center of the University of Utah under the direction of Lois Haggard, Ph.D. and Kristi Romuald, M.S.

Phase 1. -- Focus Groups

Methodology

Overview

Three focus groups were conducted with single parent AFDC recipients and their caseworkers during July and August 1992. The purpose of conducting these groups was 1) to gain rich qualitative information about single head of household AFDC recipients from their responses to the research questions, and 2) to give researchers an opportunity to understand the population of interest and design a survey questionnaire containing appropriate and relevant measures.

Subjects

Each focus group was composed of different members. The first group consisted of 18 AFDC caseworkers and self-sufficiency workers from the Office of Family Support and JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act) from various Utah counties. The second group was comprised of 14 single head of household AFDC recipients from Salt Lake County. The third group brought together seven pairs of single head of household AFDC recipients and their caseworkers from rural locations throughout the state.

Focus group participants were not randomly selected. Instead, members were purposively selected to include a broad cross section of client and caseworker demographics. Both clients and caseworkers represented the Office of Family Support's Self-Sufficiency and JTPA programs with a broad geographic representation of the state. Caseworkers in the first focus group were selected by their superiors to participate. Clients in the second group were recommended for participation by their caseworkers

based on the caseworkers' judgment of the type of information they could contribute to a focus group. Since there were more clients recommended than were needed for focus group two, the Survey Research Center staff members chose participants who represented a broad cross section of demographic characteristics (age, length of time on welfare, number of children, etc.). Caseworkers in the third focus group were selected by their superiors, and the caseworkers were allowed to select the clients who would attend the focus group with them.

Analysis

The audio tapes from each focus group were transcribed, with names omitted. This allowed researchers to review the qualitative data and identify major themes in the participants' comments.

Phase 2 -- Mail Survey

Methodology

Overview

A mail survey was used to gather demographic characteristics, attitudes, and other self-sufficiency related information from single head of household AFDC recipients.

Participants

Questionnaires were mailed to all persons who were AFDC recipients as of September 28, 1992. There was a total of 18,334 households on the AFDC roles in October. Survey eligibility required that, (a) the head of household was a single parent, and (b) it was the head of household who was the AFDC recipient, not a child or grandchild (as in the case of a specified relative). It is estimated that approximately 10%

of all AFDC recipients did not meet these two eligibility criteria. This leaves a total of 16,500 single parents receiving AFDC in October 1992.

A total of 1,619 questionnaires were received form eligible respondents before the cut-off date, yielding a sampling error of plus or minus 2.5%. Although 1,619 is a relatively large sample size in social research, the low response rate (10%) raises the issue of self-selection bias.

To address the issue of bias, the sample and the population were compared on five demographic characteristics (see Table 1). The sample matched the study population with regard to sex, household size, and children's ages, but was significantly different from the population with regard to employment status and education level. As compared with the population of inference, the survey respondents were more likely to be employed, and to have a high school diploma. This finding is consistent with the findings of Sudman[1] that a common difference between study respondents and nonrespondents is the level of education completed.

Thus, the sample appears to have characteristics (employment and high school diploma) that suggest higher levels of self-sufficiency. This information is important to bear in mind when interpreting the survey results. The primary implications of this sample bias is that the populations of single parents receiving AFDC has greater self-sufficiency needs than what would be suggested by the survey results.

Table 1

Comparison of Sample to Study Population on Five Demographic Characteristics

	Sample	Population
Female	98%	91%
Two- and three-person households	73%	72%
Households with children aged 0-2	36%	35%
Households with children aged 3-5	26%	28%
Households with children aged 6-11	38%	37%
Employed	22%	16%
High School Diploma	79%	50% (est.)

Procedure

The survey instrument was designed after careful review of the focus group data. Questions were worded so that the overall reading level of the questionnaire was at the sixth grade level. Respondents were clearly notified that the questionnaires were to be completed anonymously, and that the information could in no way affect their grant or food stamps.

Questionnaires were printed on a sheet of legal-sized paper so they could be folded with a business reply panel to the outside for easy return mailing at no cost to the respondent. Questionnaires were inserted into each AFDC recipient's payment envelope along with their October 1, 1992 checks. There was a notice published in the concurrent

month's client newsletter informing clients about the purpose of the survey. Clients were encouraged to "speak out" to make services to single parents better.

All caseworkers were mailed an advance copy of the survey questionnaire along with a memo informing them of the purpose of the survey, and giving them a number to call if they, or any clients, had questions about the survey. Extra copies of the survey were supplied to all branch offices of the Office of Family Support so that caseworkers could assist clients who did not have the literacy level sufficient to complete the questionnaire.

Analyses

Analyses were conducted to identify characteristics of 15 client segments, including: (a) Younger clients; (b) older clients; (c) clients with a history of sexual abuse; and (d) job training groups: (1) High need, high desire for job training; (2) high need, low desire for job training; (3) lower need, high desire for job training; and (4) lower need, low desire for job training; (e) long-term clients; (f) clients with parents on welfare; (g) clients currently employed; (h) clients currently not employed; (i) clients in school or a job training program; (j) clients with strong self-directedness; (k) clients with weak self-directedness; and (l) male clients.

Cross tabulations comparing their responses to barriers to self sufficiency, were run on the survey items using these groups. For most of the groups, a chi-square statistic was used to determine whether the group responded to the questions differently than respondents as a whole.

In some cases the independent, or grouping variable was strongly related to age. These groups included long term clients (long term clients tended to be older), clients with parents on welfare (who tended to be younger), and male clients (who tended to be older). In these cases, analysis of variance was used as a second independent variable in the design to control for any effects that may be caused by age alone, and not the variable of interest.

Most comparisons were made between the particular group versus all respondents indicating how members of that particular group differed from the population of single-head of household AFDC recipients as a whole. There were two exceptions: 1) The four job training groups were compared to each other, and 2) the self-directedness groups representing the upper 1/4 (strong self-directedness) and lower 1/4 (weak self-directedness) of the sample were compared.

Characteristics with Respect to Self-Sufficiency

Demographic Characteristics: Survey findings indicate that single parents receiving AFDC are largely females in their twenties or thirties with few job skills and young children in their custody. A sizable proportion or survey respondents (22%) were employed, 18% are not working because they are caring for a sick or disabled child or other family member, and another 30% are attending school or job training that precludes them from working. In the entire AFDC caseload, 16% are employed.

Social Support: Clients received support primarily in the forms of emotional support and baby sitting. Clients who receive more forms of social support and in greater amounts appear to be able to get off welfare more easily than those who do not.

Evidence that corroborated this was both qualitative from case workers in focus groups, and quantitative evidence that showed that long-term clients received less social support. The direction of causation of this relationship however, is not clear. Does social support cause clients to get off of welfare, does being on welfare for long periods of time tend to erode one's social support networks, or does some third variable, such as low social functioning create difficulties for maintaining both social networks and self-sufficiency?

Psycho-Social Aspects: Psycho-social aspects [see Table 2] measured in the survey were derived primarily from issues emerging from the focus groups. The items used to measure the construct of "self-esteem" were not highly interrelated, rendering the primary measure of self-esteem unproductive. Self-esteem training, however, was the single most requested type of training, indicated by 57% of all respondents to the survey.

Results

Table 2

Percentage of Respondents who Agreed with Each of 25 Psycho-social Items

Percent Agree	Psycho-social Scales and Items
	Factor 1: Self directedness
88%	Q19. I feel that I am a very together person
85%	Q21. I have a clear idea of what I want to do with my life.
31%	Q28. I feel confused about who I am and what I want to do.
86%	Q37. I know what type of work I would like to do.
23%	Q34. No matter how hard I try, I can't accomplish anything
	Factor 2: At Risk for Codependent Relationships
61%	Q26. It is hard for me to find a partner who treats me right.
20%	Q27. I feel that if someone tries to hurt me, there's usually not much I can so to try to stop him.
30%	Q29. My relationships always seem to end up being abusive.
23%	Q32. I am looking for someone to take care of me and my children.
68%	Q33. I feel that I need more self confidence.
	Factor 3: Parenting Needs
11%	Q24. My children have been getting into serious trouble.
39%	Q30. Sometimes I just don't have the patience to deal with my child(ren).
28%	Q34. I often get so angry that I feel like throwing and breaking things.
46%	Q40. I wish I could talk to someone about raising my kids.
	Factor 4: Self-Sufficiency Readiness
73%	Q23. I have a pretty good job record.
90%	Q36. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
91%	Q38. I am working hard to get off welfare.
27%	Q39. It would be pretty easy for me to get a new job right now.
21%	Q41. I expect I will be on assistance for a long time.
	Factor 5: School Readiness
34%	Q31. High school was a terrible experience for me.
75%	Q42. I have always been a good student.
	Factor 6: Expect welfare to provide a quality of life equal to that of working persons.
33%	Q35. Welfare should provide me with a standard of living about the same as people who work.
	Factor 7: Helplessness, desire to be taken care of by welfare
46%	Q20. I believe most of what happens in life is just meant to happen
14%	Q22. Being on welfare isn't really that bad.
55%	Q25. I trust my caseworker to decide what is right for me.

Self-directedness was a construct derived from the "goal orientation" construct in the focus group sessions, and the addition of two self-esteem items that highly correlated with it ("I feel that I am a very together person," and "No matter how hard I try, I can't accomplish anything.") Thus, self-direction combines the notions of having goals with having self-esteem. Younger respondents, and those in school or a job training program report higher levels of self-direction. Those reporting low levels of self-direction include respondents who indicate a desire for job training.

Codependency in relationships was indicated by the caseworkers as being a major, central barrier to self-sufficiency among clients. Many clients reported the same in focus group sessions. Expectations based on romance and fantasy may set these women up for relationships in which they are controlled and suppressed by their male partners. Focus group excerpts include,

> [I] was in a pretty abusive marriage. Physical, mental, anything. Um, I wanted to go back to school, when I was older, and finish my diploma, or my GED or whatever. He wouldn't let me.

And another:

> Client: You see, my ex-husband was a Viet Nam vet, too, and he made me feel like I was nothing.
>
> Moderator: Did you want to get out of the relationship?
>
> Client: No...Well, after you've been told that you're nothing, and that you're never going to get anywhere, you know... You start to believe it!

There was some evidence from the survey data to support the notion that codependent relationships may be a manifestation of more deep-seated emotional problems that are precluding self-sufficiency among survey respondents. Respondents

with a history of sexual abuse are more at risk for codependent relationships, as are clients who had parents on welfare, and those with a high need and a high desire for job training.

Parenting Skills. The expected relationship that older clients (those with older children) would have greater parenting needs was substantiated by the survey data. Older clients were more likely to report "child's behavioral problems" as a barrier, and were also more likely to report sexual abuse of a child. It was also found that clients whose parents were on welfare were more likely to report greater parenting needs, suggestive of a possible intergenerational connection.

Self-Sufficiency Readiness. Although survey respondents reported a belief in their abilities, that they were working hard to get off welfare, and didn't expect to be on welfare for long, their self-sufficiency readiness was reduced by a belief that it would be difficult "to get a new job right now." Clients appeared to blame the economic situation for this "lack of self-sufficiency" more than themselves. The single most frequently reported barrier to self-sufficiency was lack of high paying jobs, and focus group excerpts complete the picture with comments such as these:

> ...look at the jobs these women get. There are 50 other women or people behind them. If they do miss a day, they are fired; and,
>
> I'd worked at a job for seven years, but...even when I quit, I was only making $6.25 an hour, and really, that's not enough to support four children on for the rest of your life.

School Readiness. Many clients have not completed high school, therefore their basic readiness to acquire job training or basic education may be an issue. About a third (34%) indicated that high school was a terrible experience for them. However, focus

group comments seem to suggest that there is a group for whom school is viewed as a great opportunity, and highly desirable.

Sexual Abuse: Caseworkers indicated rates of sexual abuse among the female single-head of household AFDC recipient population to be as high as 90%. One caseworker indicated,

> They have been beaten down. Many of my clients come from abusive fathers, step-fathers, husbands. I don't think I have one or very, very few...I'm surprised at the amount of physical and sexual abuse that is apparent in my caseload.

One client reported that during her marriage, her husband raped his mistress' daughter, and indicated that,

> I could say for a year and a half, I didn't know who I was. But see, I had a bad childhood experience, and I figured, well, I'd know every one of these suckers, you know? But I married one. And I couldn't believe I did. And, so, yes. I still have a problem to this day.

Survey data indicated a rate lower than 90%, but still incredibly high (57%). The survey data are almost certainly an underestimate, as the question asking about sexual abuse was optional, and many survey respondents may have responded in the negative, or not at all, because they felt uncomfortable disclosing such personal information. In any event, the rates of client sexual abuse is very high, probably between 57% and 90%.

Sexual abuse was found to be related to reported lower levels of social support from family and friends. Respondents who had been sexually abused may need significantly more counseling and other forms of assistance before achieving self-sufficiency.

Barriers to Self-Sufficiency: The barriers data are subject to a phenomenon referred to in psychology as the "fundamental attribution error," referring to the tendency for an individual to attribute his or her behavior to the individual. While they did acknowledge aspects of a client's environment, caseworkers tended to make more attributions for being on welfare to characteristics of the client, such as lack of goals, low self-esteem, and fear of change. Clients, however, were clearly making attributions to the environment, as evidenced by the three most frequently cited barriers to self-sufficiency: "jobs do not pay enough," "cost of housing," and "lack of medical insurance." The truth is likely to lie somewhere in between, as environmental, economic and personal factors play substantial roles in one's ability to get and keep a well paying job that will keep her off welfare.

Skill Building/Desired Training: The three types of training that were mentioned [see Table 3] by a majority of respondents were an interesting combination: self-esteem, relationships, and job training. First of all, the percentage who wanted job training must be interpreted with caution. The figure "52%" refers to all clients, even those who said "no" because they were already working or in a job training program. When we examine the percentage desiring training within the group of respondents who were in no job training program, it is higher, at 60%.

Table 3

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Each of 18 Barriers to Self Sufficiency

Rank	Barrier	Percentage Reporting
1	Jobs do not pay enough	90%
2	Cost of housing	76%
3	Lack of medical insurance	72%
4	Poor job skills	58%
5	Safe day care	56%
6	Convenient day care	55%
7	Lack of transportation	50%
8	Other	48%
9	Poor work history	46%
10	Emotional/physical disability	38%
11	Child's behavioral problems	34%
12	Child's medical problems	31%
13	Poor reading or math skills	30%
14	No telephone	23%
15	Abusive partner	17%
16	Learning disability	16%
17	Alcohol, drug problem	7%
18	Language problem	7%

It is interesting that "relationship training" was among the top three requests.

Consider the comments of these caseworkers:

> I think a lot of them have bad relationships, whether they are just dating or living with a man or married to him, and those relationships continue to be bad even after they come on the system.
>
> There's something lacking because so many of them get pregnant but they wouldn't even consider [marrying] the father.
>
> I think the high schools ought to implement family and relationship classes, that it's not all roses, and see how relationships progress, how men and women look at things. I think that would help in the education.
>
> I think that a big problem in society today is that there are the male role models that are lacking in the home. Starting right from the time they grow up, there's no father in the home to relate to, there's no support

> there, they are feeling that need for male role models, for male comfort, for somebody to take care of them... They grow up needing that, so of course, when they find a man that kind of pays attention to them, they cling because they've needed that for such a long time...

Once again, however, regardless of the precise percentages of clients requesting job training versus other types of training, the survey evidence seems to corroborate the substantial body of evidence already gathered indicating that single parents on welfare need a number of services, including job training, counseling, life skills, and temporary financial support.

What Programs are Most Critical?

Availability of jobs that pay enough was the single most frequently reported barrier to self sufficiency [see Table 4]. In terms of the general needs of single parents receiving AFDC, it is clear from this study that one of the basic needs is for job training that can prepare these individuals for well-paying jobs in the community. For such a strategy to work, however, it is necessary that well-paying jobs exist in sufficient numbers in the community; jobs that will offer medical benefits, jobs that pay a wage high enough to support a family, and jobs that will allow the flexibility required by single parents (e.g., time off to care for a sick child, etc.). According to analyses performed by the Utah Office of Family Support, at the time this study was done, a single parent with two children would have to make $5.57 an hour to reach 100% of the federal poverty level, as defined by the Census Bureau. But, the average wage for all workers in Utah is $9.88 (Source: Division of Community and Economic Development Research Office) and the average Job Service placement wage as of July 1992 was $5.88 an hour (Source: Job Service Labor Market Information Office. It is painfully clear from these statistics that,

under current conditions, a goal of total self-sufficiency for 100% of able-bodies single parents on AFDC is not attainable.

Table 4

Training and Skills Desired by Single Parent AFDC Recipients

Rank	Training/Skill	Percentage Reporting
1	Self-esteem	57%
2	Relationships	55%
3	Job training	52%
4	Parenting	49%
5	Money management	48%
6	Goal setting	38%
7	Time management	37%
8	Resume writing	35%
9	Reading and math	24%
10	Family planning	18%
11	Other	11%

Although lack of well-paying jobs was the single most frequently cited barrier to self-sufficiency, it is also clear that there is a sizable group of single parents on AFDC that needs more than job skills and available jobs before they can be expected to make their contribution to society. These are clients for whom like has been complicated by emotional, physical and/or learning disabilities. Such disabilities have a myriad of causes, from genetic disposition to environmental trauma, and have a range of prognoses. A significant portion of this group is capable of varying degrees of self-sufficiency, but only after the necessary interventions, such as counseling, assistive devices, or special training and job placement have been made.

Job training needs are high. Examination of our sample data indicates that 90.6% of survey respondents indicated they either had not completed job training, they desired

job training, or that poor job skills or basic reading and math skills were barriers to their becoming self-sufficient. Bear in mind that members of our survey sample were more likely to have a high school diploma of GED than the single-parent AFDC population. While almost 100% of the sample would benefit from job training programs, the state currently has sufficient funding to serve only 3% of the population in need of their services (Utah Office of Job Training estimate).

Taking all the evidence into consideration, it seems that single parents on AFDC need to receive services designed for their specific circumstances. Perhaps the most effective tool for producing self-sufficiency among single-parent AFDC recipients is to provide them with a case manager who can thoroughly and adequately assess the client's needs, and who can access or refer the client to services she requires and is eligible for. This assessment would be most effective if made early on, when the single parent first seeks assistance. The process of setting clear and tangible goals should not be underestimated in producing self-sufficiency. Emotional, relationship, substance abuse, and other personal barriers must be addressed along side job training needs. The services, and the array of different services available must be individualized, but clients' needs may be addressed either singly or in tandem.

Clients must be educated regarding what is expected of them while they are receiving assistance, an also what they can expect in the way of "reasonable progress" and transitional services while they gradually get off assistance (to the extent that they are able). After initial self-sufficiency needs have been addressed, it appears that an array of transitional services, some financial and some other (coping skills, money management,

basic life skills, etc.) is also required. Medical insurance when a waiting period is required by the employer, child care services, or housing benefits until the worker's wage is sufficient to cover living expenses may be necessary to allow AFDC recipients to become self-sufficient. In addition, parents working for the first time, or returning to work after a hiatus may need one-time compensation for basic work clothing, car repairs, or other incidentals.

We might also be well advised to put some resources into prevention. In light of the fact that over 90% of all single parents on welfare are women, most of whom have children from marriages that have dissolved, it may be wise to implement relatively revolutionary actions to prevent more young adults from becoming single parents. Such actions may include high school classes in relationships, interpersonal communication, and offering other training and information, such as family planning, parenting, self esteem, and goal setting that will secure each student's place in society as a contributing member. This includes delivering the message to all girls in the public school system that they should prepare themselves for a career, and not automatically expect to be supported by a husband. Such actions may improve the outlook for our children, as well as substantially reduce the number of single parents on welfare.

Even if all such programs were implemented, however, we would never eliminate the need for AFDC. Individuals with physical, emotional, social, and intellectual disabilities will continue to need long term support, and many individuals are at risk for needing support at some time in their life due to circumstances beyond their control.

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Footnotes

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